

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Amended): A method for controlling the absorption of a liquid sample through an absorbent layer, comprising the steps of:
 - (a) providing an air gap defined by a viewing surface of an absorbent layer, at least one side wall and a surface of a translucent window;
wherein the air gap is a chamber containing ambient air pressure, and
wherein the absorbent layer is permeable to gas when dry, but is relatively less permeable to gas when at least partially saturated with liquid;
applying a liquid sample to the absorbent layer on [the] a side opposite to the air gap such that the air pressure of the air gap is increased, thereby controlling liquid sample absorption by the absorbent layer.
2. (Previously presented): The method of claim 1, wherein the sample is a human body fluid.
3. (Previously presented): The method of claim 2, wherein the fluid is a blood sample.
4. (Amended): An apparatus comprising an absorbent layer, at least one side wall and a translucent window, wherein [the] a viewing surface of the absorbent layer, at least one side wall and a surface of the translucent window define an air gap, and wherein the air gap is a chamber containing ambient air pressure; and wherein the absorbent layer is permeable to gas when dry, but is relatively less permeable to gas when at least partially saturated with liquid; and wherein the absorbent layer, at least one sidewall, translucent window and air gap are adapted such that application of a liquid sample to the absorbent layer increases the air pressure of the air gap, thereby controlling liquid sample absorption by the absorbent layer.

Serial No. 09/914,684

5. (Previously presented): The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the window is non-fogging.
6. (Previously presented): The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the absorbent layer contains a reagent that indicates the presence of an analyte.
7. (Previously presented): The apparatus of claim 4, further comprising a second layer in contact with the absorbent layer.